

MEET THE FELLOWS

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Ekaterina Daugerte

Internship: MJHS

New York, NY

Throughout my academic career, I have always held the conviction that I would end up in the helping profession in some capacity. I graduated with a Bachelor's Degree in Psychology from Hunter College with the hope of becoming a therapist. I quickly learned that I would need to further my education if I wanted to obtain the skills needed to truly help people. I chose to pursue a degree in social work for its versatility, as well as its ability to challenge me in ways few other careers will. No two cases are the same, which means as social workers, we must constantly solve problems and apply our studies and experiences in creative ways.



My passion for the helping profession stems from my own personal experiences of being a patient—I have spent countless days in a hospital bed feeling like “just a number.” I realized how much better my experience could have been if I had had a caring professional in my corner advocating for me. Learning about the Palliative Care Fellowship opened that door for me - to be an advocate for patients and families at the most difficult time in their lives. Upon my acceptance into the Palliative Care Fellowship, I was placed with MJHS Hospice and Palliative Care, where I had the opportunity to work with patients and families in their homes throughout Brooklyn, as well as at some of the skilled nursing facilities that the agency has contracts with.

Working in hospice has awarded me the privilege of supporting individuals and families during some of the most universal and vulnerable life experiences: coping with serious illness, facing one's mortality, the dying process, and bereavement. I have learned how to successfully work on an interdisciplinary team to provide the best care for each patient and family, as well as appreciate working in a medical specialty that prioritizes patients' psychosocial well-being.

During my time with MJHS, I have gained vital experience and knowledge to help me become the best social worker and person I can be. I have learned to navigate the challenges that accompany the ever-changing needs of patients and their families. My passion is with this field, and I am honored to do the work I do each day. I hope to continue learning and evolving after completing my Master's Degree and graduating from Fordham University. It is a gift to be invited to join patients and families as they travel the final path of their choice.

Samara J. Gadsden

Internship: *Cancercare*

New York, NY

Being a part of the Palliative Care Fellowship at Fordham University has allowed me to become a professional palliative social worker. The Fellowship is a very focused program of gaining skills to work with clients and family members in this area of practice. The Fellowship field placement provided me with the opportunity to work closely with individuals with cancer, allowing me to dive deep into the future work that I choose to do after I graduate. At *Cancercare*, I provided individual counseling services to persons affected by cancer. I also co-facilitated a face-to-face caregiver support group, provided counseling services face-to-face and by telephone, and provided financial assistance to help with the cost of medical treatment. It was very fulfilling to be able to help the clients by applying what I had learned in the classroom at Fordham University and at *Cancercare*.



The knowledge, skills and experience that I gained through the Fellowship opened the door for a career in palliative and end-of-life care. The Fellowship helped to jump start my career by providing the experience that is sought by many employers. I found that some viewed my Fellowship field placement experience as entry level work experience, based on the range of experiences and quality of the supervision that I had received. Being a part of the Palliative Care Fellowship has also boosted my confidence, and confirmed that I a career in palliative care was the right choice for me. The Fellowship also gave me an opportunity to network with professionals in this field. I have enjoyed the camaraderie among the Fellows. We have supported each other, both emotionally and with resources, and I believe this has contributed to our collective success.

Kathleen Hurley

Internship: Montefiore Medical Center, Palliative Care Service,
New York, NY

I graduated from Skidmore College with a degree in theatre and dance. I spent more than fifteen years living my dream: singing, dancing and acting. I performed my way across the country in regional theatres, national tours, with ballet companies, Off-Broadway, in Las Vegas, with the Ravinia Festival and the Metropolitan Opera. I loved my life and when my body started to struggle with the physical demands of professional dance, I began searching for a second career. While my soul yearned for something greater, a way to make a contribution, I did not expect to fall madly and passionately in love with a career the second time around. Boy, was I in for a surprise.



My interest in palliative care began in the most casual, unexpected way when I went on a hospice tour arranged by my employer. Pondering a new path in life, I started working at Trader Joe's while I took time to figure out what I wanted to be when I grew up. The company has a close relationship with Regional Hospice and Palliative Care and I was offered a tour of their new facility. As a matter of interest and curiosity I went on the tour. I asked a lot of questions and heard from family members of people who had used the hospice. I was so deeply moved, felt so connected to this cause, that I decided to become a family support volunteer. During the volunteer training program, I devoured the training materials and other literature about death, notably *Being Mortal* by Atul Gawande, and I pestered the social workers and nurses with questions. When the training was over, I dove into the work with patients and their families. I loved it, and I knew I wanted to become a social worker on an interdisciplinary team assisting patients and families facing end of life.

Among the lessons I had learned was that along with physical pain, patients may experience psychological, social, and spiritual pain, which are often much harder to articulate and remedy. The path through these difficulties is conversation, and an objective of such conversation is to empower the dying, to give them control over their last days. Yet there are obstacles to these conversations. People resist discussion of death. There may be denial on the part of the patient or family, or disagreement among them. There may be language barriers and cultural factors to consider. The social worker may face ethical dilemmas. Members of the interdisciplinary team need specific training to successfully have this kind of conversation, which was the training I sought. I chose at Fordham for my MSW program specifically because it offered the Palliative Care Fellowship in the Specialist year.

With Fordham's Palliative Care Fellowship, I had the good fortune to be placed with the Palliative Care Service at Montefiore Wakefield Hospital under the incomparable supervision of Ken Meeker.

Over the course of this year I have learned to collaborate with doctors, nurses and physician assistants as a member of the interdisciplinary team to provide supportive client-centered care to patients and their families. I have learned to co-lead goals of care meetings and advance care planning (code status, MOLST, health care proxy) with families and medical teams. I have also provided one-on-one supportive counseling to patients and families to mitigate psychosocial suffering, using an array of clinical techniques such as motivational interviewing, cognitive behavioral therapy, and crisis intervention through a strength-based lens.

The opportunity I have had to learn and grow as an intern with Montefiore Wakefield has been incredible, but I feel it is just the tip of the iceberg. I have thrived in this supportive environment of seasoned and dedicated palliative care practitioners, the advice I have been given and the skill I have witnessed in my mentors at Montefiore inspire me and push me to be better every day.

In closing, I love this work. It is my life's passion and mission to help patients and their families find hope when they feel hopeless, make meaning of their struggles, and find physical, emotional and spiritual comfort during life-limiting illness and end-of-life. I have had the privilege to begin my career as a palliative social worker as a Fellow and intern at Montefiore, where I believe I have not only grown immensely, but added something with my presence, passion and energy. It has been an honor to be welcomed and accepted by the interdisciplinary team, to work alongside them to improve quality of life for these patients and families.

Carolyn McKenna

Internship: Hospice Care Network,

Long Island, NY

My interest in palliative care built slowly. When I first began my social work education in preparation for a second career, I did not know that I would have an interest in palliative and hospice care. I knew I was interested in research related to personal loss, loss pertaining to declining health and reduced self-sufficiency, and loss and grief surrounding chronic and terminal illness. My personal experiences with the illnesses and deaths of my parents and brother led me to understand that comfort during the dying process was a gift, and that being with someone, helping them to realize their strengths and to reinforce that their illnesses did not define them, was an honor. I remember thinking that it would have been beneficial if my family had someone to turn to for guidance during these illnesses.



I felt a pull to learn more about this during a class on Ethics in Health Care. The class was taught by a minister who had decades of experience working with persons who were dying. The insight that I gained from this class was important to me for many reasons, including the compassion needed at end of life. But most importantly for me, it caused me to reflect on my experiences for the first time in quite a while. I realized that it would have been so helpful if my family had known not just that my mother had a very serious illness, but that my mother was dying. Once I recognized that palliative care is a specialized practice area in social work, my interest in this area grew. I knew that I wanted to pursue the training that would allow me help individuals and their family members as they cope with life-threatening illness.

My internship at Hospice Care Network has provided me the experience to work with patients and their families in the home. I work on an interdisciplinary team of skilled and caring professionals, all of whom are dedicated to the well-being of each patient. I feel fortunate to be placed in this internship and mentored by passionate and skilled professionals in this field, and that it was made possible by the Palliative Care Fellowship at Fordham University Graduate School of Social Service

Everyone deserves dignity as they face healthcare and end-of-life decisions. Palliative care provides great comfort to those facing illness and death. The fact that death is inevitable is a connecting factor for all of us. Having someone there to help us through the process can preserve feelings of dignity, worth, and well-being. I am honored to do this work.

Yoland Moriah

Internship: St. Mary's Hospital for Children, Palliative Care Program
New York, NY

Deciding to pursue a graduate degree in social work has proven to be one of the best decisions I have ever made. I have always aspired to be in a helping profession and my academic pursuit at Fordham has exceeded my expectations. Being accepted into Fordham's Palliative Care Fellowship is one of my greatest accomplishments thus far.



Before pursuing my MSW, I had worked with adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities in both the residential and day habilitation setting. I realized that many of the older adults had a difficult time accessing medical resources that provided pain management and comfort care to individuals with terminal illness.

Even before I knew much about palliative care, I gravitated toward this field as a way of providing the best care at end of life. My experience with loss in both my personal life and professional work also contributed to my realization that I wanted to work in palliative care.

As a Palliative Care Fellow, I am placed at St. Mary's Hospital for Children in Bayside Queens in the Palliative Care Department. After working with a geriatric population for many years, it has been a real shift to work in pediatrics. I found that I had a passion for working with children and I believed that this placement at St. Mary's has provided me with the perfect opportunity to connect with and support children and their families at such a crucial time in their lives. At St. Mary's, I work alongside the dedicated palliative care team to support medically fragile children and their families.

While working in the pediatric palliative care setting is challenging, it is extremely rewarding. Building therapeutic relationships with patients and their families is one of the most important aspects of my work. It is a privilege to be surrounded by families who are wonderful advocates for their child. Working alongside the palliative care team to identify each patient's and family's needs, to formulate realistic and appropriate goals of care, and to provide the support they need, were key elements of my work at St. Mary's.

I have become very passionate about the field of palliative care and am excited to begin my career opportunities in this field. I feel very blessed to have obtained the knowledge and experience I have through the Fellowship.

Marisa Taddeo

Internship: Hospice Care Network

Long Island, NY

From the time I was a child to my high school years, when I began to contemplate my career options more seriously, I have always stated, “I want to help people.” While I began my undergraduate career as a student in Hofstra University’s Physician Assistant Program with the agenda of ‘helping people,’ I quickly realized that this chosen career was not the role I wanted to have in the medical field. I found myself more interested in the psychosocial aspects of people’s lives and wanted the ability to have the time and opportunity to explore these issues with them. I began to research careers that would afford me this experience.



It was at this time, through both personal and professional experiences, I witnessed the work of social workers, and discovered my ‘dream profession.’ While studying Psychology, Disability Studies, and Community Health during my undergraduate career in order to prepare for Fordham University’s MSW program, I had a most meaningful opportunity as a Child Life volunteer in the Pediatric Ambulatory Chemotherapy and Transfusion (PACT) Unit at Cohen Children’s Medical Center. Throughout my time at the hospital, I interacted with children who ranged in age from only a few weeks old to young adulthood, with varied diagnoses from chronic illnesses to terminal cancer conditions. Through this experience, I grew to understand the necessity of advocacy for these patients and their families and the importance of an interdisciplinary approach in doing so. I soon discovered that palliative care and palliative social work uniquely provides patients of all ages and their families with these necessary services.

Learning about palliative social work placed a name to a field of work I have longed to be a part of. As a Palliative Care Fellow, I have grown through the experiences and knowledge I gained. This has forever changed the way I work with clients and their families. At Hospice Care Network, where I am completing my field experience, I have had the opportunity to work with adults with terminal illness, and their caregivers, in both the community and inpatient settings. Through this work, I have had the opportunity to sit down with patients and families, listen to their psychosocial needs and wishes, and empower and support them through this vulnerable time in their lives.

My experiences both in the classroom and in my field placement have provided me with not only the necessary education, but also the passion that propels me to continue this important work. While my patients and families often thank me for the work we share, I thank them for allowing me to be a part of their lives. The relationship is reciprocal and I feel that I grow with each encounter. I am grateful for all that this Fellowship has brought to my life personally and professionally. As I look forward to the next phase, and perhaps the true beginning of my career as a social worker, I will take this education, passion, growth, and gratitude with me each step of the way.

Harleny Vasquez

Internship: Mount Sinai Queens, Palliative Care Service

I received my Bachelor's Degree with a major in Psychology from Hunter College in 2014. I learned about the field of social work at my first job after college, as a resident advisor at Covenant House, a shelter for at-risk youth. I also worked with a low-income population in a variety of practice areas, including early childhood, mental health, foster care and in the shelter system. In each of these areas, I provided advocacy, support and guidance to my clients. My clients were across the lifespan and ethnic groups. I had developed some core skills in working with clients and families, including those dealing with medical challenges.



For as long as I can remember, I had been drawn to working in a health care setting, helping individuals with a challenging health problem. Through my personal experiences, I had been involved with friends and family members who had life-threatening illnesses. When I learned about the Palliative Care Fellowship program at Fordham University, I felt this would be a perfect choice for helping me to reach my goal of working as a professional to help patients and families experiencing serious illness. I was truly grateful to be accepted into the program and to be placed at on the Palliative Care Team at Mount Sinai Queens.

The placement has been an amazing experience. I have seen the contribution the Palliative Care Team in helping individuals facing a life-threatening illness. As I became more knowledgeable and skilled in providing this specialized care, I was able to provide comfort and support to these patients and their families, and this has been such a rewarding experience. This Fellowship has given me the opportunity to learn how to help many of these individuals find peace and dignity at end of life by understanding and respecting their final wishes.

Through my internship at Mount Sinai Queens, I have been able to learn from the skilled and compassionate social workers and other members of the interdisciplinary team. This has been a life-changing experience for me. I am extremely grateful to have been given this incredible opportunity of learning, high-level supervision and mentoring, and support.

Joy Wyatt

Internship: MJHS

New York, NY

I worked in the field of human resources for thirty years, focusing on organizational effectiveness, leadership, learning and managing change. After a family experience in the world of elder care, I decided to change direction and pursue the MSW at Fordham. My goal is to work with elders and families as they approach end of life.



In my Foundation-year field placement, I met patients in a dialysis center, from all socioeconomic backgrounds, who had end stage renal disease in common. I witnessed the determination and commitment of chronically ill patients to achieving their life goals. Interesting people with fascinating backgrounds told life stories that signaled they were not finished yet, even though they had a life-limiting illness. This experience led me to focus on palliative care social work and to apply for the palliative care fellowship, so I could continue learning about how to support the chronically ill who value quality of life.

In my advanced-year internship at MJHS Hospice and Palliative Care, I work with end-of-life hospice patients in a skilled nursing facility or in their homes. I help patients and families develop strategies for strengthening bonds with their loved ones and beginning to prepare themselves for a new chapter. Most of the clients I see are in hospice for a relatively short time, and the work we do with their families helps to prepare them for the best possible death for their loved one. One of my clients has been in hospice for nearly a year, mostly bedbound. He has moved through a period of depression to strengthening his connection with his family, becoming more hopeful and setting small goals that help to improve his daily quality of life.

It is very satisfying to help chronically ill clients set and accomplish their goals even when do not know how long they have to live. It is also very rewarding to provide the support and comfort that helps families arrive at a peaceful acceptance of the end of life.